

THUMB ROLLS



Rolling the shoulder blades toward each other stretches the chest while strengthening the back. Both actions can help improve rounded-back postures, common in frail adults. I've named it *Thumb Rolls* because of the way you cue participants to roll their thumbs backward with straight arms. It seems to accomplish the shoulder-girdle movement better than when you cue them to roll their shoulders back.

Benefits »

- ⦿ Strengthens posture muscles, especially the scapular retractors.
- ⦿ Improves shoulder-girdle function and flexibility.

Set It Up »

You will not need any special equipment. Some variations require a balloon or a balance disc and a chair with arms.

How to Do It »

The Start

- ⦿ Participants should sit with their back away from the chair (the hips can touch the chair, but the back should not). Shoulders over hips, head retracted comfortably, and chin level. Feet are flat on the floor, hip-width apart.
- ⦿ Arms should be straight and down by the sides.
- ⦿ Thumbs face forward or in.

The Moves

Use the following cues.

- ⦿ Roll the thumbs from facing forward to facing backward as you are able without pain.
- ⦿ Squeeze the shoulder blades closer together.
- ⦿ Hold the position 3 seconds. Relax.
- ⦿ Repeat 4 times and progress to 12 times, as tolerated.
- ⦿ Stretch the midback gently and do a few shoulder rolls when done.

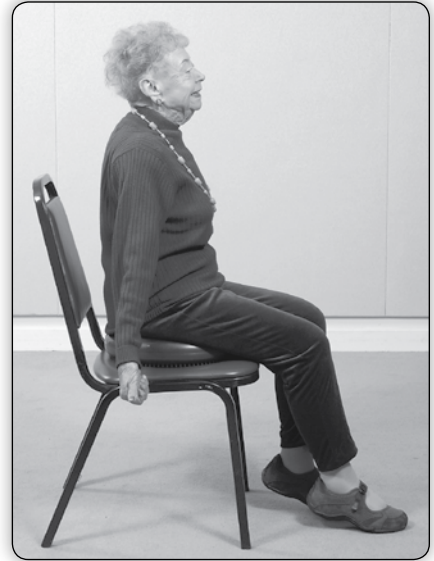


Take It Further »

- ⦿ Increase the hold times while continuing to breathe fully and deeply.
- ⦿ Combine it with the Tall Sit.
- ⦿ Add backward wrist circles to Thumb Rolls; it will recruit a few more posterior shoulder muscles.

Give It More Balance »

- ⦿ Add slow head turns.
- ⦿ Use an offset or tandem foot position.
- ⦿ Use an offset or tandem foot position with heels lifted, as shown in the picture to the right.
- ⦿ Use a chair with arms and place feet on a balloon.
- ⦿ Sit on a balance disc in a chair with arms.
- ⦿ Stand for Thumb Rolls.
- ⦿ Do them while walking tall.



Keep It Safe »

If the activity is not comfortable for the back, try using a gentler motion. If that is not helpful, they should not do the exercise.

Live It »

Thumb Rolls is one of those feel-good exercises that lifts and expands the chest and makes deep breathing easier.